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## Book Review

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Elizabeth McAnally, *Loving Water Across Religions: Contributions to an Integral Water Ethic* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2019), 180 pp., \$26.00 (pbk), ISBN: 978-1-62698-307-6.

Elizabeth McAnally's concise book, *Loving Water Across Religions*, is an accessible series of meditations on water's significance as well as an effort to begin charting—even if provisionally—how water fits into an integral ecological ethic. *Loving Water* has the distinction of being one of the few books that offers comparative religious perspectives on the particular subject of water while also gesturing toward the possibility of a constructive ethic. McAnally is clear that in light of the global water crisis, it is wise to 'explore how water plays a central role within religious myths and rituals, and how contemplative practices with water can transform the ways we know and relate to water' (p. 43). The hope is that this, in turn, will help to orient human beings to the task of 'cultivating mutually enhancing relationships among humans, water, and the entire Earth community' (p. 43).

The Introduction (Chapter 1) positions *Loving Water* within the discourse of integral ecology, which will be valuable for readers who are not familiar with the several genealogies and trajectories of integral ecology (notably including theorists Leonardo Boff, Thomas Berry, and Ken Wilber as well as those who have further developed those approaches). For each of the three subsequent chapters, McAnally explores a facet of a different religion and identifies an insight that can be incorporated into an integral water ethic. Thus, Chapter 2 delves into Christian theology and the practice of baptism, finding that Christianity (when properly oriented toward watery realities) can cultivate a 'sacramental consciousness'. Chapter 3 explores in detail the religious and environmental realities of the Yamuna River in India, drawing on the important work of David Haberman and Kelley D. Alley, as well as McAnally's own experience at a conference on the river's decline and religious-environmental restoration efforts. From Hinduism McAnally draws on the notion of *seva*—loving service—as another essential part of an integral water ethic. Chapter 4 engages Buddhism, focusing on water-wisdom teachings of Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh and the emerging environmental leadership of Ogyen Trinle Dorje (one of two recognized claimants for the title of the seventeenth Karmapa, titular head of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Vajrayana). From Mahayana Buddhism, suggests McAnally, we can take insights about the compassionate wisdom of water. Developing an archetype from bodhisattva and the more recent coinage of 'ecosattva', McAnally suggests that what is needed is an *aquasattva*—one who sees water as a bodhisattva, and 'who says: I vow to liberate water and all beings from suffering. When I am of service to water, I help water become of service to all beings' (p. 130).

McAnally's emphasis on the flourishing of Earth community as a teleological orientation indicates her foundational orientation to the thought and legacy of Thomas Berry. Notions of ecological community, 'the Great Work', and Berry's particular version of integral ecology figure throughout the book; her suggestion that 'water thinks itself in and through us' is reminiscent of Berry's idea that in human beings the universe becomes conscious of itself. McAnally also writes in first-person reflective mode about what aspects of Berry's thought have inspired her, and what material artifacts connect her work on water to his teachings (see, for example, her discussion of water meditation before writing, pp. 137-38).

*Loving Water* does not intend to be exhaustive, but rather 'points to ways of cultivating a respectful and reverential relationship with water through an ethic rooted in an integral approach to ecology' (p. 3). Especially in the Conclusion, McAnally spells out what that ethic might mean: 'An integral water ethic is a way of interacting with water and all beings dependent upon water by cultivating values of love, compassion, respect, care, reverence, and gratitude' (p. 155); 'Cultivating an I-Thou relationship with water and our whole Earth community is key to the Great Work of our time. This is the task of an integral water ethic' (p. 163). As a closing gesture, McAnally writes that 'an integral water ethic constitutes a democratic approach to watershed management, economics, and policy, working toward water justice and peace' (p. 167), but by and large the strength of the book lies in its approach to elucidating how integral ecology works for individuals and introducing the idea of water's subjectivities—not, that is, in considering implications for political economies, ecologies, or strategies for justice.

Thus, what I found to be among the most intriguing proposals of McAnally's book is the notion that water's subjectivities need respectful attention and recognition, and that religious worldviews are a portal to that distinctive consciousness. McAnally claims that religions are particularly important sites for considering the subjectivity of water because of 'the importance of myths, rituals, and contemplative practices for cultivating a respectful relationship with water' (p. 20). She asserts that an 'integral water ethic involves an attitude that brings water into one's awareness and concern and...is a way to enter into the interior dimension of water itself' (p. 21), later elaborating that 'religious worldviews can teach us about the potential character of water's interiority' (p. 162). This matters, for McAnally, because 'listening to and representing the many voices of water is necessary for addressing water issues in creative, effective, and democratic ways' (p. 21).

Despite the book's significant reliance on the notion of subjectivity, I was left with the sense that McAnally could have said much more—and with more nuance—about what she means by water's interiorities and the importance of a subjective approach (not only recognizing the varieties of human experiences, but also the subjectivities of water itself). While it is clear that the subjective, multi-level, and multi-perspectival approaches of integral ecology have shaped McAnally's theory and practice, it is also the case that more clarity is needed on what is meant by water's interiority, and why religions may be more authoritative vessels of that knowledge than other modes of cultural expression, and what would happen when interpretations conflict. If pursued, this would provide some promising potential points of connection with feminist new materialist scholars of water such as Astrida Niemanis. Moreover, given the emphasis put on water's subjectivity, agency, and (sometimes) pluralities, I was surprised not to see a chapter discussing Indigenous advocacy and articulations of ontologies/values

of waters as relatives/kin—especially as posited by Indigenous water protectors (especially but not exclusively in the US/Turtle Island) or books like *Downstream* (2017, edited by Dorothy Christian and Rita Wong).

Constructive criticisms aside, one of the strengths of this book is that it attempts to model what it advocates: McAnally integrates her multiple perspectives and encounters with various waters (intellectually, culturally, spiritually, physically) and draws on her first-person experience in many different parts of *Loving Water*. She is explicit that love for water motivates her writing, and—in ways distinct from most academic texts—in Chapter 5 McAnally offers six constructive, meditative practices for cultivating an integral water ethic. In this regard, I was reminded of the last chapter of Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si’*, which underscores the importance of ecological and spiritual education and practice, not just discourse.

Because of its multifaceted approaches and accessible, practice-based conclusions, *Loving Water* is a text that will be suggestive for a range of audiences. Academics will benefit from pairing it with Chamberlain’s *Troubled Waters* (2007). Devotees of Thomas Berry, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim will find much to consider, both theoretically and in terms of first-person stories and connections. And I can easily envision a range of religious or interfaith discussion groups finding much to explore in this accessible, lovingly crafted testimony to water.

Christiana Zenner  
 Fordham University  
 christiana.zenner@gmail.com

#### References

- Christian, Dorothy, and Rita Wong (eds.). 2017. *Downstream: Reimagining Water* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press).
- Chamberlain, Gary. 2007. *Troubled Waters: Religion, Ethics and the Global Water Crisis* (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield).